

Hobo Writings

OVER MANY YEARS (AROUND 84 YEARS OR SO) HOBO'S HAVE ATTEMPTED TO WRITE INFORMATION, AND/OR HISTORY CONCERNING THEIR CULTURE TO PRESERVE THE ACTUAL TRUTH AS OPPOSED TO GENERAL NEWS REPORTS THAT INEFFECTIVELY RECORDS THEIR LIVES AND LIFESTYLES. WHAT FOLLOWS IN THIS PDF IS A SMALL RECORD OF THIS STYLE OF WRITING, CLIPS OF BOOKS THAT (HOPEFULLY) WILL GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR READING, AND/OR RESEARCH.

America's Greatest Living Hobos Share Their Tales of Riding the Rails

By Peter Rugg (<https://www.thrillist.com/authors/peter-rugg>)

Published on 3/21/2017 at 12:01 AM

Cheapskate travelers will find no shortage of tips on how to travel on a budget: the best time of year to book flights, how to rent out your home, arcane websites that promise half-off on flights that only board for three hours on the morning of the winter solstice, and so forth. But the ultimate cheap travel move? Don't pay. For anything.

Sounds simple enough, but of course nothing in this life (hack) comes for free. For guidance we turn to the ultimate freeloading traveler -- the train-hitching American hobo.

The tightest advice we got? "I tell people the best way to enjoy traveling is always the safe way," says Connecticut Shorty, a former hobo "queen," as crowned at the National Hobo Convention that takes place the second week of August, every year since 1900, in Britt, Iowa. "Hopping freights is illegal and dangerous."

But those enormous drawbacks don't deter everyone. Let's say you did want to ride the rails, and to see America as workers and travelers and drifters have since the 1800s? Well, you'd definitely want to listen to these hobos, each respected enough to have been elected king or queen by their peers, each telling their tales here in their own words. Don't try this at home, maybe. Or, hell, maybe do -- speeding away with a cold wind in your face, a metal-on-metal clackity-clack offering the soundtrack to a journey that people do still, to this day, run out to the rail yard to make happen.

Ricardo

I was elected Hobo King last year. You aren't making decisions or hobo decrees or anything like that -- it's about respect. The whole thing started with a hobo convention back in 1896 because a bunch of vagrants were getting ticketed and hauled away, but if you were carrying a card as part of a union they couldn't haul you away. So, they got together and did that and elected a president. These days it's a king and a queen.

If you want to ride the rails, be careful. It's dangerous! There are crazy people out there. I'm still riding but I don't want my full name out there, just in case. You might cross paths with someone and you never know what they heard or where from. Then they meet you and put two and two together and you got problems.

I've been riding since 1973. I was 22. My first trip, me and my friends wanted to go down to Idaho to see Evel Knievel jump the Snake River

Canyon. We got all split up going down there and while we were on the train Evel had to cancel the jump until next year because somebody said it was illegal, but from then on I was hooked on the trains.

This is all stuff I learned from the older guys who started riding in the '40s and '50s.

I became a fruit tramp. You'd follow the fruit-picking jobs around California. Back then you could ride without hiding because the train wanted you to pick fruit because half the time the train was the one hauling the fruit out. You could knock on the door of the caboose and they'd give you water in a jug with the train company logo on it.

This is all stuff I learned from the older guys, guys who started riding in the '40s and '50s. They'd tell you how to ride, where to pick strawberries. You wanted to stay away from corporate farms since they'd just drive you. Local farmers were decent and sometimes they'd give you a cabin in the orchard to stay in.

You have to be careful of the bull. That's railroad security. He's just doing his job. You keep a train between you and the bull, you'll be OK. I'm talking about when you're in train yards and you're running from one train to another. Long as there's a train in between you it's usually safe because the bull isn't going to jump a moving train to get you.

You want to travel light. I never rode with gloves but some people say they're essential. I carried a cast-iron fry pan because I like to eat and cast iron cooks good on an open fire.

You have to have water. That's a must. You can go a couple days without food but not without water.

In the '70s we had jungles -- those are places to camp -- and that was like our phone lines. You'd roll in there, sometimes there'd be a pot of coffee; people just leave stuff for the next person. I've only found one jungle in recent years out in California. Now people are staying under bridges more. I don't know why.

Used to be the rule of thumb was that you went into a jungle and if there was someone there, you asked them to use the fire. If they pulled out a match and handed it to you, that meant they wanted you to leave them alone and go off somewhere and start your own fire.

That's the difference between a tramp and a bum.

To take something, you have to bring something. If you got something you throw it in the stew, if you don't have anything you go out and gather wood and earn your keep. That's the difference between a tramp and a bum. I started out as a tramp and I'll always be a tramp, but that means when I'm

traveling I'm working to make my way. Bums don't do nothing. Most of them are the guys you see locally, just hanging around town.

Just don't ride stupid. I drank back in the '70s and that was one of the most dangerous things I could possibly have done, going around those huge yards with all the moving trains. There are kids right now riding what they call "suicide." That's when you're in a train car with no floor. Just some purchase around the edges. You can't go to sleep. You got to hook your pack up. You got to stand the whole way just above those wheels. I don't think people realize how dangerous those wheels are. There are parts of the ride where metal shavings from the tracks will get peeled off and just shoot up like shrapnel. You can butcher a deer with that stuff.

You can go to jail if you get caught. Mostly they'll give you a fine and charge you with criminal trespassing, but if it's a train yard that's had a lot of problems with hobos they might put you in jail for a couple days to send a message. Or citizens will see you riding the trains and call ahead to the police because they think they're doing you a favor, like they're trying to save your life or something.

It's the freedom. That's what I love. But it's a full-time job too. I'm a white guy, but if you want to know prejudice put on a backpack and take a walk through a strange town. You can't do it as a vacation. You're out there riding and you have to come back to work and that's in your head the whole time and then it's not freedom anymore. So I took a break and worked for a while. The second I retired, get the backpack, let's go.

Jason Hoffman/Thrillist

Connecticut Shorty

My father was a well-known hobo named Connecticut Slim. He hoboed 44 years and is buried in the Hobo Memorial Section of the Evergreen Cemetery located in Britt, Iowa. When I traveled to Britt in 1990 with my sister, NY Maggie, to bury our father, we met a lot of his hobo friends and have been attending the National Hobo Convention every year since. In 1992 several hobos in Britt asked me to run for queen. I ran and was elected. I'm considered a hobo historian and give cemetery tours of the Hobo Memorial Section every August.

I took my first freight train ride in June of 1993. I hopped on a Southern Pacific freight train in Dunsmuir, California, with Road Hog USA. Our ride was on the rear deck of a one-hole grainer (grain car). The hobos call this type of ride "ridin' the porch." In total I've ridden 5,000 miles on freight trains. I've never been afraid. Just excited to be having a free adventure.

It's best to ride on the rear of a freight to break the wind. There's no way to

be real comfortable on a freight train. They're made of metal and are real noisy, not to mention dangerous. You must be alert for danger at all times. I usually sit on my backpack to help cushion the ride. When I roll out in my sleeping bag I just put up with the hard steel floor and listen to the rumbling along the rails. I usually don't sleep anyway -- I'm too excited and don't want to miss anything. On a "piggyback" I put my sleeping bag around myself and back up against a truck tire to help break the wind.

In total I've ridden 5,000 miles on freight trains. I've never been afraid.

The hardest part of riding freights is carrying everything you need. No matter how light you pack, the load does get heavy. Sometimes you have to walk a long way to get to the trains and/or out of the yards. Most trips also require some hitchhiking or public transportation.

I always carry water, wear good shoes, long pants, have insulated underwear with me (even in summer), have a windbreaker, glasses to protect my eyes, ear plugs to protect my ears, leather gloves with the fingers cut out, dry food, sleeping bag, tarp, extra socks, plus a few other items. I always wear black clothes and try to "catch out" at night because it's harder to be seen. I carry water in smaller bottles here and there to distribute the weight. I wear a vest with a lot of pockets to help with weight distribution. I always carry what I consider real necessary to survive in my vest pockets in case I lose my pack. The rest of the items go in my pack. I roll the sleeping bag and attach it to the bottom of my pack.

No glass! All should be unbreakable. Many times you toss your pack off the train before you get off. Also, I carry a few large trash bags to protect my gear in case of bad weather, and a poncho.

Frog

I was waiting on a train and this group of kids jumped me and beat the shit out of me. So, yeah, you want to be careful. This was way back in 1995. I had seen this group of kids wearing baseball uniforms and carrying bats and I figured they were taking a shortcut through the train yard on the way to practice I'd guess. They came along, cracked me in the back of the head, and when I came to I couldn't walk and there was a bone sticking out of my pant leg.

So there I am, stuck in Casselton, North Dakota, thinking I'm going to get killed on the tracks. Finally I was able to flag down a train inspector and he's yelling and screaming at me to move off the tracks and I'm pointing at my leg because it's obvious he can't hear me. He yells out to me, "I'll get some help!" Comes back with the paramedics and took me 30 miles east into Fargo to have what was to be my first of many surgeries because the bones

in my right leg were shattered from my kneecap down to my toes. Those kids had taken everything I had, even my boots, and they wanted to make sure I wasn't coming after them.

I was 45 at the time, and I'd been riding since I was a teenager and that's the first and only time anything like that ever happened to me.

You can bring a flashlight, but I wouldn't myself because you'll end up babysitting people all the time.

I started out in Jacksonville, Florida. I was getting thrown off beaches and stuck in jail overnight because they wouldn't let you sleep on the beach down there. I was just hitchhiking all across the country. Anyway, the police in Jacksonville released me and told me to get out of town in 24 hours. I met this guy Pinky, and he says to me, "You ain't getting a ride out of here from anyone. You might as well just catch out." I'd never ridden a train before so I didn't know what the hell he was talking about.

So he asks if I want a beer and I did. He asks if I have any money, if I've got a job, I tell him no. "Well, just wait here and I'll get you something." He brought me back two 40-ouncers of beer. Two hours later, I'm following him to jump on a train. I had this little goddamn Boy Scout pack back then -- hell, I was just about 16 -- and I passed that up to him on the train and he says, "Hop on!" That train was a loader. The car was just this big, black car with the sides open. Carries junk and scrap, usually. I never slept the whole night. I was just amazed how easy it was not to have to beg for a ride. I wasn't cold or anything, but by the time we got to New Orleans the next day I was filthy as hell. Fell in love with it that night.

I got the name Frog because I'm from Canada and I had a habit of speaking French in my sleep. I used to go by the name Canadian Wetback but when I got busted and put in immigration jail for a few days they said I needed to get a different name, anything else, so Frog stuck.

Travel light, that's the first and foremost thing. Always keep your ears and eyes open. Just have a bedroll and maybe a change of clothes you can wrap up in your bedroll, and make sure the colors are dark so you can be somewhat disguised on the train. And if you're waiting in the jungle to catch it's easier to go undetected.

You can bring a flashlight, but I wouldn't myself because if you have one of those you'll end up babysitting people all the time.

I spent 31 years doing it, altogether. I was Hobo King in '97. But I had to retire back in 2001 when my leg got amputated. The right leg those kids crushed. Surgery after surgery and they just never could get it to heal right.

The End of the Road

*You wonder why I'm a hobo and sleep in a ditch.
Well, it's not because I'm lazy, I just don't want to be rich, . . .*

*Now I could be a banker if I wanted to be,
But the thought of an iron cage is too suggestive to me.
Now I could be a broker without the slightest excuse.
But look at 1929 and tell me what's the use?*

—TRADITIONAL HOBO VERSE

Terrors and Tragedies of the Road

*Early every morning the sheriff comes around
He gives us rotten herring that weighs a quarter pound.
With coffee like tobacco juice and bread that's hard and stale.
And this is the way they feed us boes in Cecil County Jail.*

— BILL QUIRKE, HOBO

Road Kids

*Granddud I want to be a hobo
That's what I want to do
Help me if you can, when I get to be a man
I want to be a hobo too.*

— TRADITIONAL HOBBO VERSE

“Vampires” of the Road: Tramps

*Trump, tramp, tramp keep on trampin
Nothin doin here for you
If I catch you round again
You will wear the ball and chain
Keep on trampin that's the best thing you can do.*

— TRADITIONAL FOLK VERSE

Flipping Freights

*I've decked the tops of flying cars
That leaped across the night
The long and level coaches skimmed
Low, like a swallow's flight.*

*Close to the sleet-bit blinds I've clung
Rocking on and on;
All night I've crouched in empty cars
That rook into the dawn.*

— HARRY KEMP, HOBO POET

**"Speakin' in general, I 'ave tried 'em all,
The 'appy roads that take you o'er the world.
Speakin' in general, I 'ave found them good
For such as cannot use one bed too long,
But must get 'ence, the same as I 'ave done,
An' go observin' matters till they die."**

— *Sectins of the Tramp-Royal.*

Canned heater. One who drank a deadly potion of cheap alcohol and water.

Carry the hammer. To walk the streets all night.

Checkerboard crew. Mixed crew of white and black workers.

Chuck-a-dummy. To fake a fainting fit in order to get sympathy.

Cinder dick. Railway policeman.

Clover kicker. Farmer.

Cowcatcher. A slanted frame on the front of an engine to throw off cattle and other obstructions.

Croaker, crocus. Doctor.

Crumb boss. Janitor or porter for Western construction-camp bunkhouses.

Crumbs. Lice.

Crummy. Caboose; in early days of the boomer railroader, cabooses were often plagued with lice.

Death woods. Plank above the coupling of boxcars.

Deep-sea chef. Dishwasher.

Deborn. Denatured alcohol.

Dicer. Fast freight.

Dick. Detective.

Dimmer. Dime.

Dingbat. Professional itinerant tramp beggar.

Dip. Pickpocket.

Ditch. To put off a train.

Doughhead. Baker.

Drag. Slow freight.

Drag, on the. On the road.

Drift. To walk or hike.

Flip. To hop a train.

Flop. Place to sleep.

Fly mugs. Private police.

Frisk a drag. To search a freight for a suitable riding place.

Fuzzy tail. Tramp in bad humor.

Galway. Priest; name of county in Ireland applied to Irish-Catholic priests.

Gandy dancer. Hobo shovel stiff; track section hand.

Gas. Wood alcohol; doped cider; ether.

Gat. Gun.

Gay cat. Usually refers to amateur or tenderfoot hobo; sometimes used to describe lower-class stiffs.

Gila-monster route. Part of Southern Pacific running through Maricopa County, Ariz., to Yuma; many 'boes were ditched in Gila Bend, a desert town on that route.

Gink. Poor unfortunate.

Glims. Spectacles.

Going on the farm. Going on a side track.

Gondola. Flat freight car with no top.

Gooseberrying. Stealing clothes off a clothesline.

Graveyard. Hash.

Gump. Chicken.

Gunsel, guntzel. Green youth.

Guts. Meat, usually sausage.

"NEVER GONNA CEASE"

I had to take on whatever Mother Nature threw at me as her most ardent pupil and disciple and bona fide American hobo, what's left of us as we walk in the sunset of Hobo oblivion.

—Lord Open Road, Britt Convention

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL THE WORLD THAT——has been a student at THE HOBO COLLEGE and has attended the lectures, discussions, clinics, musicals, readings, and visits to art galleries and theaters.

He has also expressed a desire to get an education, better his own conditions and help build a world that will be without unemployment, poverty, wars, prostitution, ignorance, and injustice.

He pledges himself to try individually to live a clean, honest, manly life, and to take care of his health and morals, and abstain from all habits that undermine his health and better nature. He agrees to cooperate with all people and organizations that are really trying to abolish poverty and misery, and to work to build a better world in which to live.

*Oh, I like my boss,
He's a good friend of mine;
That's why I am starving
Out in the bread line.*

*Hallelujah, I'm a bum,
Hallelujah, bum again;
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again.*

*I got a job on an extra gang
Away out on the mountain,
I paid my fee and the shark shipped me
And the ties I soon was counting.
The boss he put me driving spikes
And the sweat was enough to blind me,
He didn't seem to like my pace
So I left the job behind me.
I grabbed a hold of an old freight train
And around the country travelled,
And the mysteries of a hobo's life
To me were soon unravelled.
I travelled east, I travelled west
And the shacks could never find me,
Next morning I was far away
From the job I left behind me.
I ran across a bunch of stiffs
Who were known as Industrial Workers,
They taught me how to be a man
And how to fight the shirkers.
I kicked right in and joined the bunch
And now in the ranks you'll find me,
Hurrah for the cause, to hell with the boss
And the job I left behind me.*

—“Mysteries of a Hobo's Life” by T-Bone Slim

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
The jails are made of tin,
And you can bust right out again
As soon as they put you in;
The farmer's trees are full of fruit,
The barns are full of hay, '
I'm going to stay where you sleep all day,
Where they boiled in oil the inventor of toil,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.*

"Won't you let me have some,"

Said I, "Good Mister Bum?"

Remember you were once a kid yourself."

He looked at me quite fiercely

O'er his grizzled, gray mustache;

On his weather-beaten face appeared a frown.

He said, "You little bummer,

What for should you pling me?

Why don't you batter privates up in town?"

He asked me what my age might be;

I told him just sixteen,

That Boston was the town that I came from.

In his eyes appeared a stare,

"I think you I will snare,

For you surely have the makings of a bum."

*Oh, when I was a little boy
I started for the West,
But I hadn't got no further than Cheyenne
When I met a husky "burly"
Who was rather poorly dressed,
And he flagged me with a big lump and a can.
When I saw that cup of coffee,
How it made me think of home!*

Often heard but seldom seen
Was the bum called Lousey Mike,
Jimmy the Sneak from Cripple Creek
And old St. Louis Pike.

K. C. Bill all dressed to kill
Shook hands with Boston Red,
While High Card Joe from Buffalo
Played cards with Portland Ned.
Louisville Slim and Portland Paul
Fixed up a jungle stew,
While Cockney Tim and Soft Collar Slim
Sneered gumps for our menu.

Seldom Seen spieled out a song
Along with old Chi Sam,
And the Salina Shark from Central Park
Clog danced with Frisco Dan.
So we gathered round the jungle smudge
The night was goin' fast
We'd all served time in every clime
And the guff was of the past.

... Some came from the old Buckeye State,
Some came from Boston, Mass.
That afternoon the tenth of June
They gathered there en masse,
From the Lone Star State came Dallas Jim
And Red the Katydid,
From Kalamazoo with Dirty Lew
Came the Sacramento Kid.
Ohio Dan and Frisco Red
Blew in with Salina Jack,
Irish Shang from the old Boo Gang
And Big Mack from Hackensack.

The cars lay on a siding through the night;
The scattered yard lamps winked in green and red;
I slept upon bare boards with small delight,—
My pillow, my two shoes beneath my head;
As hard as my own conscience was my bed;
I lay and listened to my own blood flow;
Outside, I heard the thunder come and go
And glimpsed the golden squares of passing trains,
Or felt the cumbrous freight train rumbling slow;
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

Against the tramp the laws are always right,
So often in a cell I broke my bread
Where bar on bar went black across my sight;
On country road or rockpile ill I sped
Leg-chained to leg like man to woman wed,
My wage for daily toil an oath, a blow;
I cursed my days that they were ordered so;
I damned my vagrant heart and dreaming brains
That thrust me down among the mean and low—
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

I crept with lice that stayed and stayed for spite;
I froze in "jungles" more than can be said;
Dogs tore my clothes, and in a woeful plight
At many a back door for my food I pled
Until I wished to God that I was dead . . .
My shoes broke through and showed an outburst toe;
On every side the world was all my foe,
Threatening me with jibe and jeer and chains,
Hard benches, cells, and woe on endless woe—
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

*In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks,
And little streams of alcohol
Come a-trickling down the rocks.
The box cars are all empty
And the railroad bulls are blind,
There's a lake of stew and whiskey, too,
You can paddle all around 'em in a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.*

Judge: Why are you in town?

Accused: I'm trying to find a job.

Judge: Where are you headed?

Accused: New York.

Judge: Why?

Accused: To look for work.

Judge: How much money do you have?

Accused: I'm broke.

Judge: What are you going to do tonight?

Accused: I don't know.

Judge: You are a vagrant. Sentence: seven days.

*I've decked the tops of flying cars
That leaped across the night;
The long and level coaches skimmed
Low, like a swallow's flight.*

*Close to the sleet-bit blinds I've clung
Rocking on and on;
All night I've crouched in empty cars
That rode into the dawn.*

*Seeing the ravelled edge of life
In jails, on rolling freights
And learning rough and ready ways
From rough and ready mates.*

fear, fades into memory. As Virginia Slim, a hobo troubadour from Richmond, put it:

*And few are left who know their rhyme
Since long ago when they departed
Over run by changing time
So pay attention now my children
And the old story I will tell.
About the jungles and the freight trains
About a breed of men who fell.*

*You scoff at the rebel and lynch him till dead
But I was an outcast and they called me a Red,
You call me Christ Jesus with intelligence dim
But I was a rebel called Jerusalem Slim.
And my brother: the outcast, the rebel and the tramp
And not the religious, the scab or the scamp . . .*






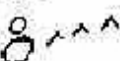
*Long-haired preachers come out every night,
Try to tell you what's wrong and what's right;
But when asked about something to eat,
They will answer in voices so sweet:*

*You will eat, bye and bye,
In that glorious land in the sky;
Work and pray, live on hay
You'll get pie in the sky when you die.*

A Hobo Dictionary

Mulligan stew:	hobo stew
mushfakir:	umbrella mender
panhandle:	beg
pearl diver:	dishwasher
profesh:	experienced hobo, sometimes a criminal
prushin:	young boy on the road
punk:	young hobo; also, bread
railroad bull:	railroad policeman
railroad dick:	railroad policeman
rattler:	train
road kid:	young hobo
shack:	brakeman
sky pilot:	mission-house preacher
slave market:	employment agency
stem:	street
stew bum:	old hobo wasted by alcohol
stiff:	any kind of hobo worker
town clowns:	town police
vag:	vagabond
wobs:	Wobblies, members of the I. W. W.
wolf:	older hobo who preys on young hoboes
veggs:	criminals on the road, usually burglars and safecrackers

HOBO SIGNS

	Turn Right
	Turn Left
	Straight Ahead
	A comb has teeth— So has a dog
	Top Hat
	Kind Woman

A HOBO DICTIONARY

alki:	alcoholic
angel food:	mission sermon
batter:	to beg
bundle stiff:	hobo who carries a bundle usually containing shirts, socks, razor, etc.
blind, blind baggage:	space between the engine and the mail or baggage car
boomer:	seasonal or migratory
bridge snake:	structural iron worker
cannonball:	fast freight train; also called a deer
carry the banner:	walk the streets all night
dingbat:	old hobo who mooches off other hoboes
dip:	pickpocket
flip:	hop a train
flop:	place to sleep
gandy dancer:	manual laborer on the railroad
gay car:	tenderfoot hobo
glims:	spectacles, light
gump:	chicken
grinder:	teeth
harness bull:	policeman
hog:	locomotive
jackrolling:	robbing a drunk
java:	coffee
jolt:	jail sentence
jocker:	road kid's teacher and companion; the relationship is often sexual
jungle:	hobo camp
jungle buzzard:	tramp who hangs around jungles and begs
kicks:	shoes
lump:	handout
mark:	hobo sign indicating a person or institution willing to give food
mooch:	beg, usually at back doors

Where the ham and eggs grow on trees
And bread grows from the ground
And the springs spurt booze to your knees
And there's more than enough to go around

Where the chickens crawl into the skillet
And cook themselves up nice and brown
And the cows churn their butter in the morning
And squirt their milk all around

Where the lanches grow on the bushes
And bump the 'boes in the eyes
And every night at eleven
The sky rains down apple pies.

His home is where the birds sing
And young girls swim in the fountains
And the cigarettes grow with the matches
In the big potato mountains.

In the Big Rock Candy Mountains
You never change your socks
And little streams of alcohol
Came a-trickling down the rocks
The boxcars are all empty
And the railroad bulls are blind
There's a lake of stew and whiskey too
You can paddle all around 'em in a big canoe
In the Big Rock Candy Mountains.

Conclusion

*I crept with lice that stayed for spite
I froze in "jungles" more than can be said.
Dogs tore my clothes, and in a woeful plight
At many a back door for my food I pled
Until I wished to God that I was dead . . .
On every side the world was all my foe
Threatening me with jibe and jeer and chains
Hard benches, cells, and woe on endless woe
And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.*

— HARRY KEMP, HOBBO FOLT

The End of the Road

*You wonder why I'm a hobo and sleep in a ditch.
Well, it's not because I'm lazy, I just don't want to be rich, . . .*

*Now I could be a banker if I wanted to be,
But the thought of an iron cage is too suggestive to me.
Now I could be a broker without the slightest excuse.
But look at 1929 and tell me what's the use?*

—TRADITIONAL HOBO VERSE

Oh why don't you work
Like other men do.
How the hell can I work
When there's no work to do?

Hallelujah, I'm a burn.
Hallelujah, burn again
Hallelujah, give us a handout
To revive us again.

Terrors and Tragedies of the Road

*Early every morning the sheriff comes around
He gives us rotten herring that weighs a quarter pound.
With coffee like tobacco juice and bread that's hard and stale.
And this is the way they feed us hoes in Cecil County Jail.*

— BILL QUIRKE, HOBO

Where is my wandering boy tonight?
The boy of his mother's pride.
Oh, he's counting the ties with a bead on his back
Or else he is dinging a ride
He's on the head of a cattle train, lady
That's where y're brat is tonight.

His heart may be pure as the morning dew
But his tags are a sight to see
If he's nailed for a vag [vagrant], his plea won't do
'Sixty days,' said the judge, 'you see.'
Oh, where is my boy tonight?
Oh, where is my boy tonight?
The chilly wind blows, to the hoosegow he goes
That's a here your brat is tonight.

Road Kids

*Granddud I want to be a hobo
That's what I want to do
Help me if you can, when I get to be a man
I want to be a hobo too.*

— TRADITIONAL HOBO VERSE

“Vampires” of the Road: Tramps

*Trump, tramp, tramp keep on trampin
Nothin doin here for you
If I catch you round again
You will wear the ball and chain
Keep on trampin that's the best thing you can do.*

— TRADITIONAL FOLK VERSE

Flipping Freights

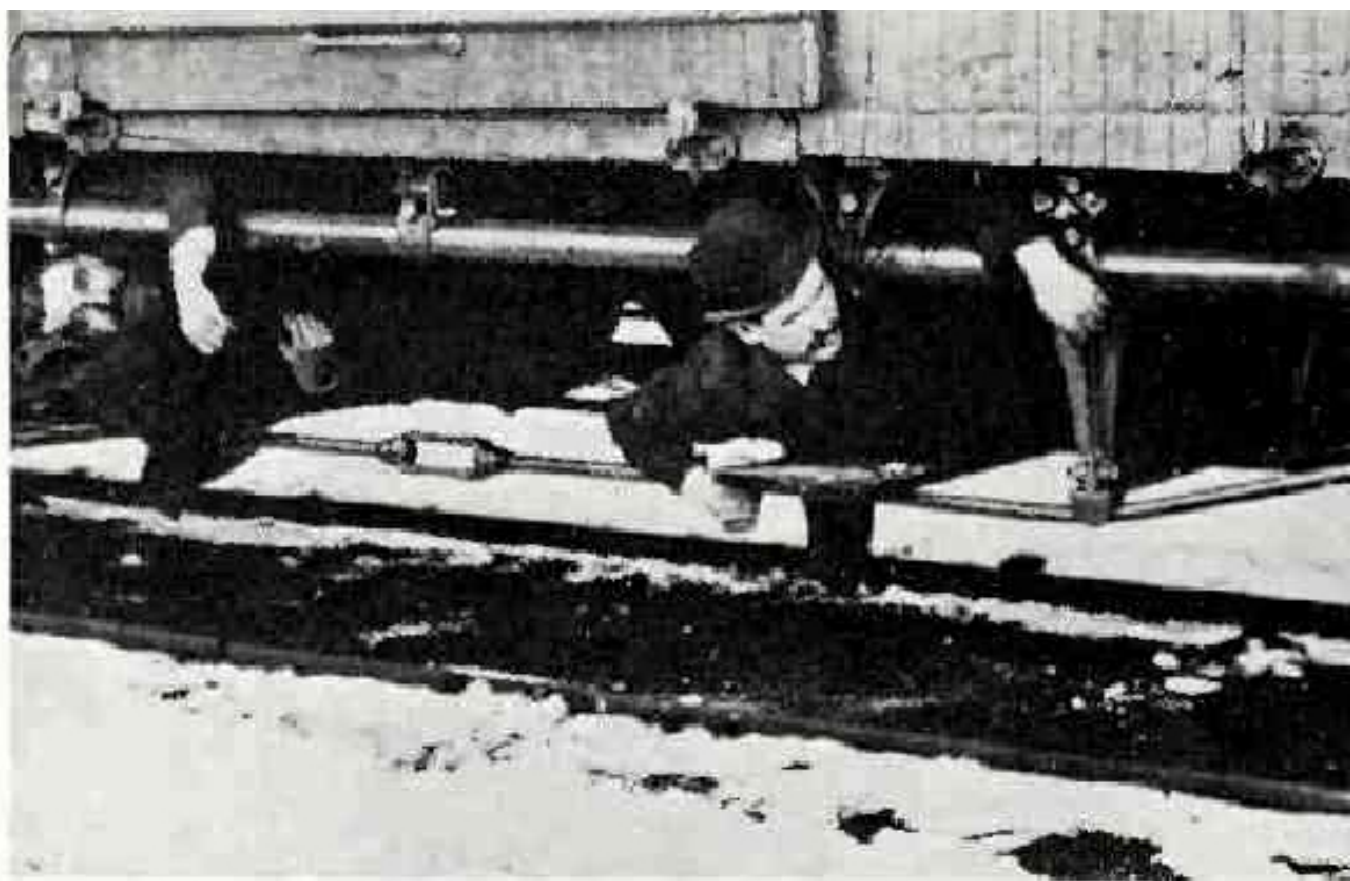
*I've decked the tops of flying cars
That leaped across the night
The long and level coaches skimmed
Low, like a swallow's flight.*

*Close to the sleet-bit blinds I've clung
Rocking on and on;
All night I've crouched in empty cars
That rode into the dawn.*

— HARRY KEMP, HOBO POET



A 'BO, Yakima Valley, Washington, August, 1939



*Providence Bob and Philadelphia Shorty
on their 'tickets', 1894*



Jungling, 1895



Jungle, Downer's Grove, Illinois, 1924







Sparky Smith



Frisco Jack



Walking Toward L.A., March, 1937



HEARST METROPHONE NEWS

THE "PROMISED LAND" BARRED TO "HOBOS"

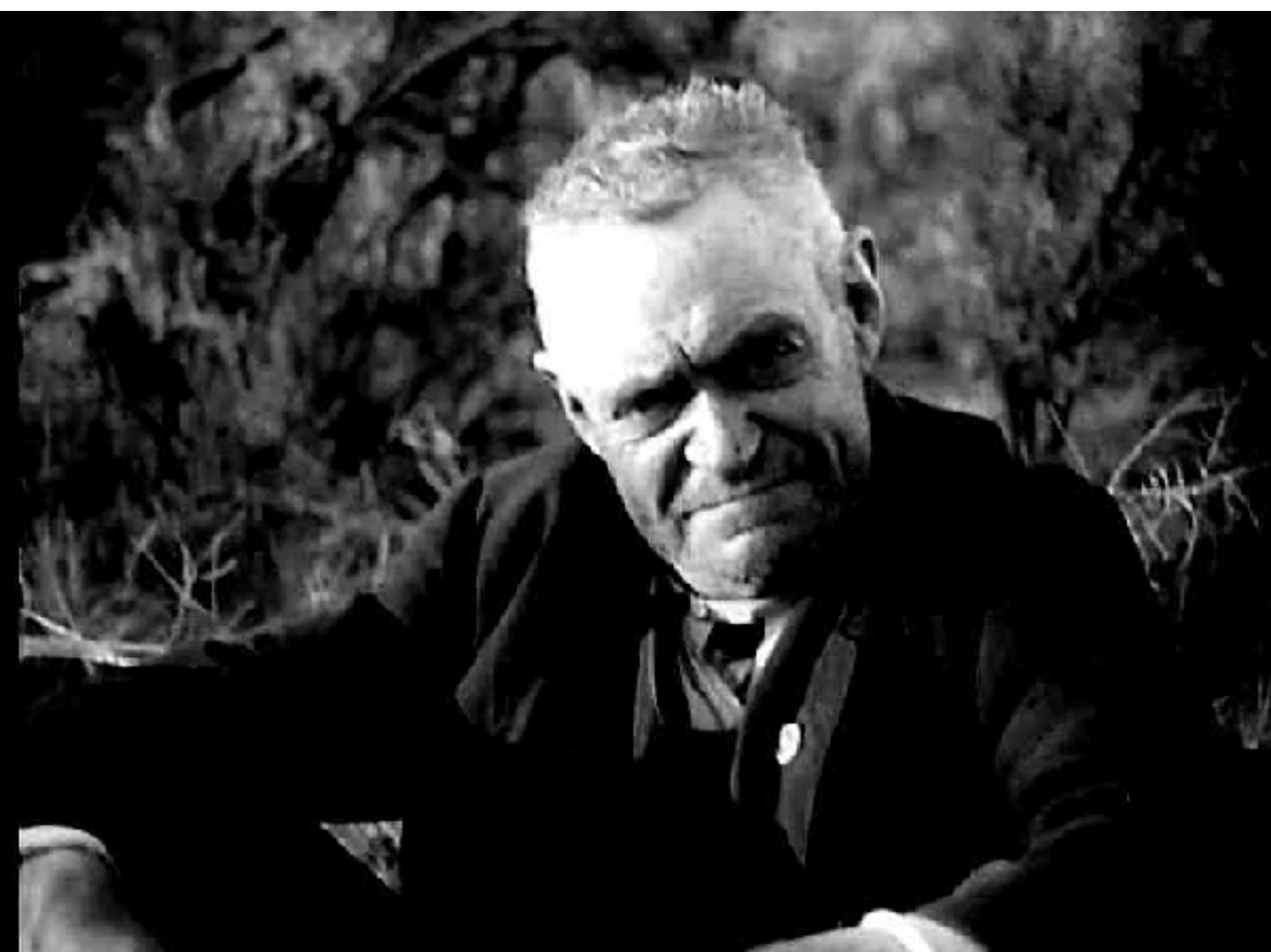
Southern California closes
borders to the penniless and
starts big controversy



























































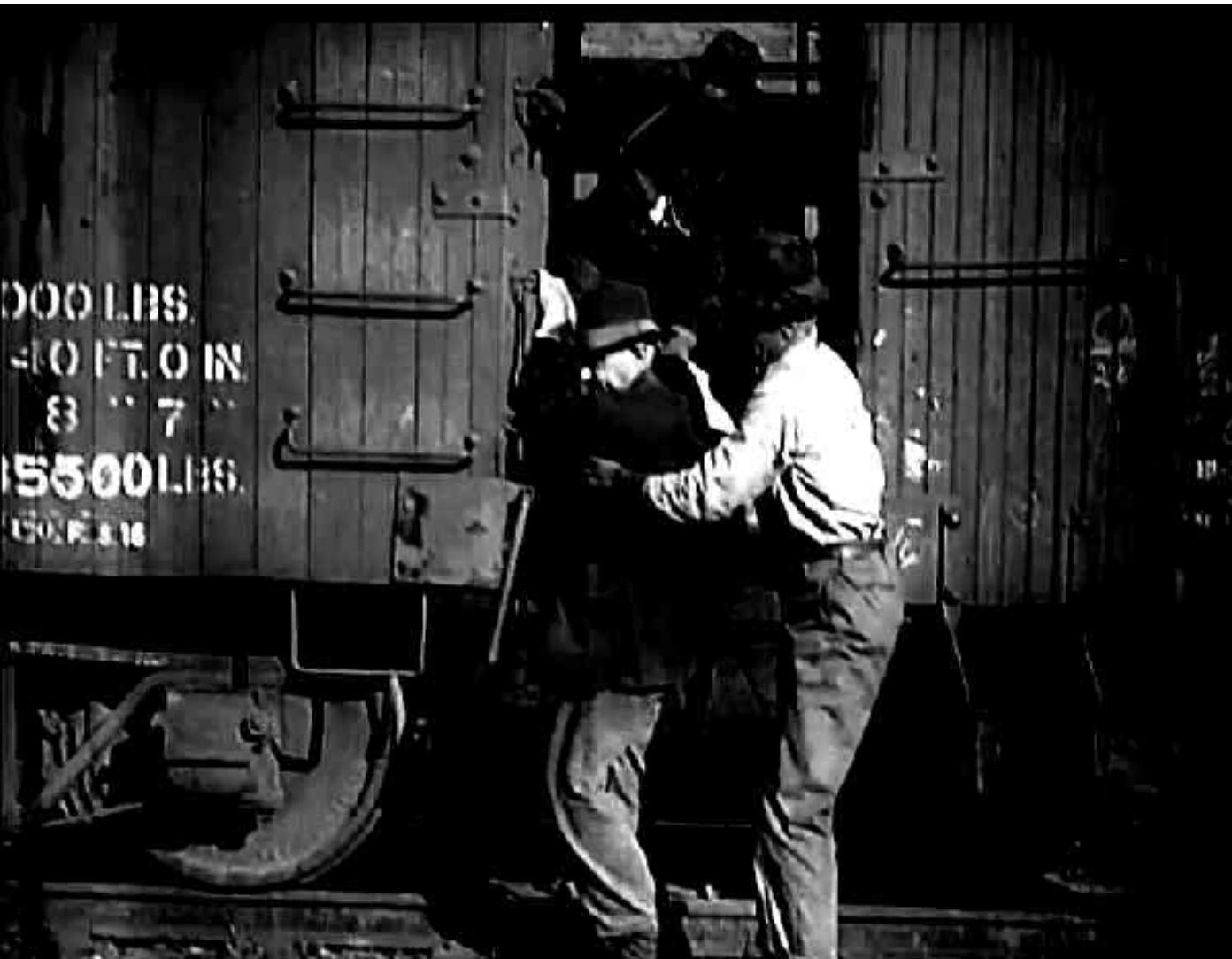




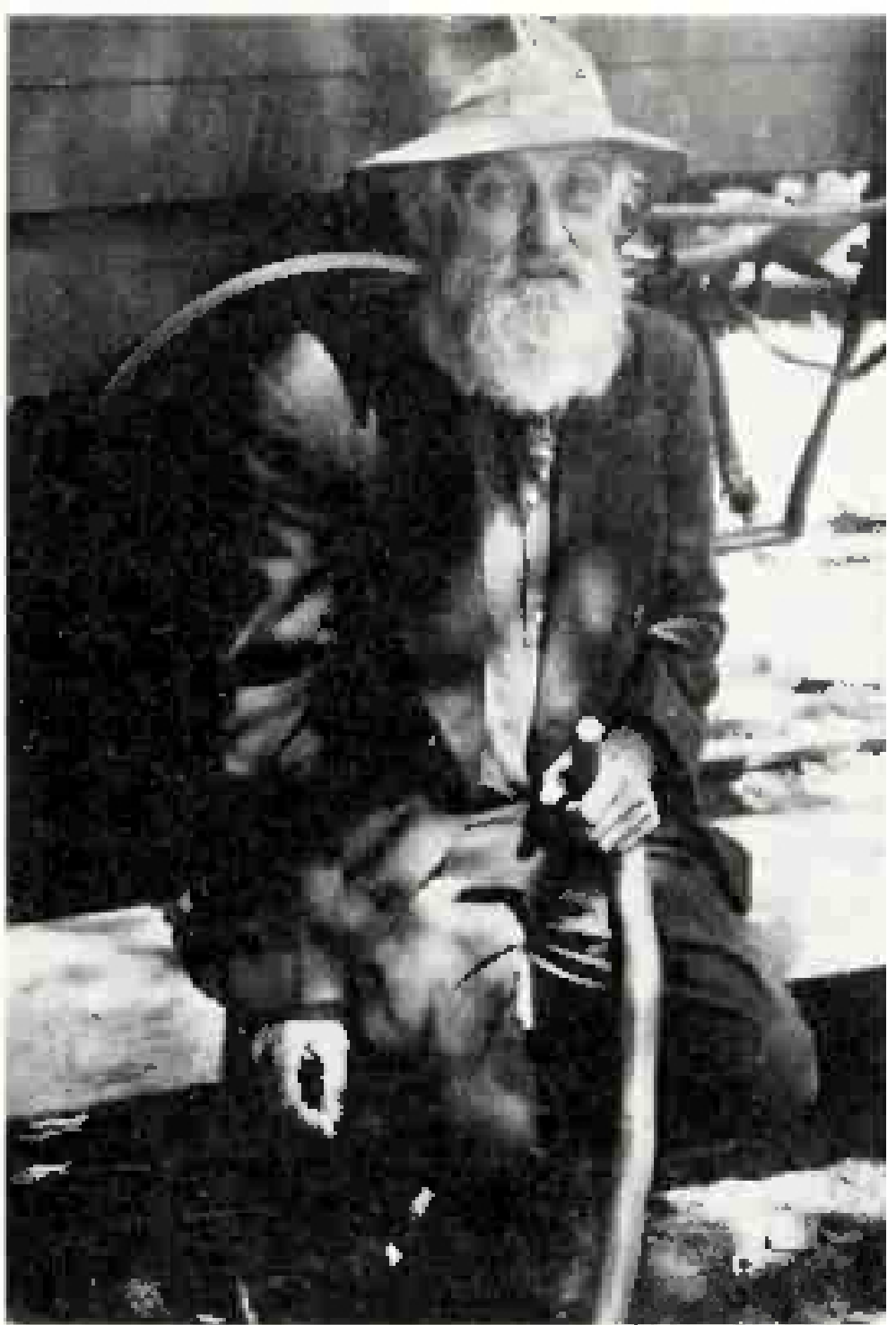












Sparky Smith



Frisco Jack





Jungle, Downer's Grove, Illinois, 1924

